

The Ultimate Battle
Luke 4:1-13
February 14, 2016

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.” And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’ ” And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” And Jesus answered him, “It is written, “ ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.’ ” And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, “ ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,’ and “ ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’ ” And Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’ ” And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

How do you envision an epic battle? Maybe that brings to mind huge armies meeting in hand to hand combat. Maybe your thinking of something more contemporary; bombs, artillery, laser guided missiles. If you're into science fiction, you might be seeing energy beams and force fields.

Today's text is an account of the greatest battle of all times. Think about the cosmic powers that contended against each other as the battle between the Lord of Life and the lord of death unfolded. However, surprisingly, this battle was nothing more than a conversation. The battle was a battle of words. That's it – just words.

Satan is the ultimate con artist. When he uses words, he uses them to lie and deceive. Jesus said: *[Satan] was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies* (Jn 8:44 ESV).

Paul refers to Satan as the angel of light. Satan can disguise himself as polite, caring, nice, even helpful. He can lead people into thinking loving is cruel, wrong is right, and the truth is a lie. Satan is an expert at spinning the facts. He is always politically correct. He knows how to present his case to raise your self-esteem. His is the master of deception.

Jesus, on the other hand, is truth. He said of himself: *I am the way, and the truth, and the life* (Jn 14:6 ESV). He also said: *If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free* (Jn 8:31-32 ESV). Jesus doesn't spin the facts. Jesus knows the truth isn't always politically correct. He knows the truth doesn't always make us feel good about ourselves. He knows that love sometimes means telling someone a truth they don't want to hear.

Too often people underestimate the power of words. The great military powers of the past and present are nothing compared to words. Words convinced the people of Germany to put Adolph Hitler into power. Words convinced a small group of men to hijack airplanes and fly them into buildings. Words convince men, women, and children to strap explosives on their bodies and detonate them in crowded places.

Satan bends the power of words to serve his will. He even bends Scripture in order to mislead people. In today's text, he twists the words of the psalmist. He omits a word here and a word there until the end result is a lie.

The first temptation in today's text is very subtle. When this account is read, some people think that changing stones to bread isn't that big of a deal. After all, there are two accounts of Jesus multiplying small amounts of bread in order to feed thousands of people. What would be the big deal of zapping up a little bread for a hungry man in the wilderness. There wouldn't even be any witnesses.

The bread itself wasn't the problem. The problem was a matter of faith. Satan was trying to shake Jesus' faith. As a human, Jesus had to live as one of us. That means Jesus had to do the same things we must do. Trusting in the Father was one of those things.

Satan was trying to plant doubt in Jesus' mind. "Your Father has forgotten you. Your Father is going to let you die from hunger. Your Father's promise to care for you means nothing. Your real concern is for your hunger. You're going to have to take matters into your own hands. You can't rely on your Father." These are the thoughts Satan wanted Jesus to think when he said: *If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread*

(Lk 4:3 ESV).

That particular temptation has been around for a long time. God brought the Israelites out of Egypt. He took them through the Red Sea. He destroyed Pharaoh's army. Still, in the wilderness, the people listened to the voice of Satan, they rebelled against Moses, and turned their backs on God.

The same thing happens today. At the first sign of trouble, people turn away from God and turn to the world for advice and help. This is the very foundation of the abortion industry. People trust the words of the world. They trust the words of Satan. They even trust their own words instead of the Word of God.

The second temptation makes Satan sound like he's losing it. He asks Jesus to bow down and worship him. On the surface, this sounds ridiculous. Anyone with a couple of living brain cells knows that worshiping Satan is beyond stupid. However, don't count Satan out just yet.

Satan is a supreme con artist. He knows that anything that comes between you and God, anything that disrupts your worship of God, anything that you would not sacrifice

for God, is satanic worship. We can worship Satan without even knowing we are worshipping Satan.

Jesus said: *Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters* (Mt 12:30 ESV). No middle ground. It's God or Satan.

Satan offered Jesus the world. Today, some people are willing to do almost anything just to get along. Satan uses this against us. He looks for biblical truth that offends some people or makes some people uncomfortable. Then, he tells us that part of Scripture isn't important. No one reads that part anyway.

Satan says, "Worship me. Trust me. I guarantee ignoring those disturbing words in Scripture will generate peace in your congregation. All you have to do is ignore a few parts that most people don't like. What harm could there be in that?"

At that point, Satan has people judging what parts of Scripture are important and what parts are not; what we should believe and what we should exclude all for the sake of peace. However, in reality, what is actually happening is people beginning to judge God and how much they can trust God. When we are arrogant enough to judge the validity of God's word, we are worshipping Satan.

In the final temptation, Satan puts on the robes of a preacher. He quotes from Scripture, but he only quotes the parts that suit his purpose. He warps God's promise to protect us into God's permission to do stupid things. Like jump off a building, or taking illegal drugs, or cheating on your spouse.

There are false preachers who still use this tactic. They pick and choose which words they use and which they skip. Here's an example: Jesus said, "This is my body, this is my blood," but some preachers say, "Jesus didn't mean is, he meant represents." Here's another example: Jesus said to make disciples and teach everything he commanded. However, some people feel qualified to decide how much is enough. When we decide we know enough about God, we are saying we have had enough of God.

Sadly, we must all admit we don't listen to God's Word as faithfully as we should. Too often, we let Satan, or the world, or our sinful nature pick and choose the words of God we will listen to and follow. Satan and the world seduce us with words we want to hear. Sometimes we even become our own god and listen to ourselves rather than God. We all deserve punishment both now and for all eternity for failing to hear and follow God's Word.

Nevertheless, there is comfort in our text. There we read of Jesus' victory over Satan, his lies, and his temptations. Jesus stood his ground. He held fast to his faith in his Father. For every temptations Satan posed, Jesus countered with Scripture. Jesus suffered more in those temptations than we will ever experience. He was tested and he proved faithful. He is our champion.

But this wasn't the only time Jesus was tempted. Satan was constantly badgering him through the Pharisees, the Priests, and the crowds. Sometimes from his own disciples. Through all this Jesus lived a sinless life, a perfect life.

However, at the end of his perfect life, he was filled with sin. Not his sin, but our sin. Placed on Jesus was every sin of every sinner who has lived and who will live. When the time came to punish sin, that punishment fell on Jesus. He took upon himself the punishment for every time we listen to someone other than God. Jesus took the punishment and he died on the cross.

Yet, Jesus didn't remain dead. Listen to the words of Peter: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you* (1 Pe 1:3-4 ESV).

This world is a dangerous place. Satan and his minions are constantly tempting us to turn away from God's truth and listen to lies; Satan's lies, the world's lies, even the lies of our own sinful flesh. Their goal is to rob us of our salvation.

The good news is Christ, our champion and Savior, has faced and defeated all temptation. He lived a sinless life in our place. He has endured our punishment. He has triumphed over sin, death, and Satan. He now gives us his victory and his righteousness. Therefore, we will live with him for all eternity in the presence of God the Father.